

Switzerland

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Freedom of the Press

Freedom of expression is guaranteed under Article 16 of the constitution, while Article 93 explicitly guarantees the independence of broadcast media. The penal code prohibits public incitement to racial hatred or discrimination, spreading racist ideology, and denying crimes against humanity. The law does not specifically prohibit anti-Semitic speech or Holocaust denial, though there have been convictions for such expression in the recent past. In December 2013, the European Court of Justice ruled that a Swiss law against genocide denial violates freedom of expression principles.

It is a crime to publish information based on leaked “secret official discussions,” particularly regarding banking information. In January 2011, Swiss authorities arrested a former banker after he gave information on wealthy tax evaders to the antisecrecy organization WikiLeaks. In 2013, the media continued to report on similar whistle-blower scandals, such as the case of Hervé Falciani, a former systems engineer for the Geneva-based private banking unit of HSBC who, in 2008, had released account details of 24,000 clients to Lebanese banks relating to investigations of terrorist financing and money laundering. A 2006 transparency law is rarely used due to a lack of awareness of its existence and provisions.

There were no attacks or cases of physical harassment against journalists in 2013, either while they attempted to cover news stories or in retaliation for their work.

Large publishing houses control most of the print sector, and such concentration of ownership has forced many stand-alone newspapers to merge or shut down. Broadcast media are dominated by the public-service Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR), which is obliged to carry content in each of Switzerland’s four official languages—French, German, Italian, and Romansh. There are 3 German, 2 French (also broadcasting in Romansch), and 1 Italian television channels, and 17 radio stations. Radio has maintained its popularity, though because of the country’s linguistic divisions, most private stations are local or regional. Swiss television viewers also have extensive access to cable services and foreign channels. The internet is generally unrestricted and was accessed by nearly 87 percent of the population in 2013.

To accommodate multiplatform access, in May 2013 the Swiss parliament instructed the Federal Council, or cabinet, to revise the 2007 Federal Radio and Television Act (RTVA). This reform would substitute the radio and television reception fee with a universal fee paid by every household. This fee will also help fund public service radio and television.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

12

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

4

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

3

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

5